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St. Francois County and Its Description

Early Settlement, Location, Organization, Growth, Area and Development of Southeast Missouri's Leading County.

ST. FRANCOIS COUNTY

First Settlement.

The first Americans to settle within the territory now embraced in this county were John Alley, Andrew Baker, Francis Starnater and John Andrews. These gentlemen migrated to this territory in 1794 and located claims in the vicinity of Big River Mills, in Big River Valley, but did not bring their families thither until two years later. In 1796 they came with their families and lived in tents, all but Andrew Baker, who erected a log house. During the year 1796 several other families fol-

lowed them here, and a considerable settlement was made along Big River. In 1797 Henry Fry, one of the newcomers, and Rebecca Baker, the beautiful daughter of Andrew Baker, decided to marry. There was no one nearer than Ste. Genevieve authorized to perform the marriage ceremony; so they, in company with Catherine Miller, Wm. Patterson, Mary and Abraham Baker, started to Ste. Genevieve. When near Terre Blue they met a band of Indians, who robbed every member of the party of their clothes, except Rebecca, the intended bride, and Abraham Baker, leaving them otherwise unmolested. This incident resulted in a temporary abandonment of the anticipated trip.

Murphy Settlement

Rev. Wm. Murphy, one of the pioneer Baptist ministers of East Tennessee, with his son, William, and a friend, Silas George, came to the vicinity of Farmington in 1798 and located claims in the neighborhood of this city. David Murphy, another son of Rev. Wm. Murphy, came to this country from Tennessee in 1801, and felled the first tree in what was long known as the "Murphy Settlement."

Cook Settlement

In the year 1800, Nathaniel Cook located in the Southeast part of this county, not far from where Libertyville now is, in the neighborhood still known as the "Cook Settlement." James Caldwell, Wm. Holmes, Jesse Blackwell, Elliott Jackson and James Davis followed soon after and settled in the "Cook Settlement." Nathaniel Cook

Re-inforcement of Murphy Settlement

Rev. Wm. Murphy, upon a visit to his old home in Tennessee, died, and in the year 1803 Sarah Murphy, his widow, and the mother of David Murphy, decided to settle on her husband's grant. So, in company with the rest of the family, consisting of

phy, were Davis F. Marks, a son-in-law of Michael Hart, Isaac Mitchell, Sr., Isaac Burnham, James Cunningham, Sr., and John Robinson.

Farmington Surveyed, and First Settlers

Upon the organization of St. Francois County it became necessary to decide upon location for a Seat of Justice, or a County Seat, as we now say. So the gift of David Murphy was accepted and surveyed and the Seat of Justice located on this tract of land in 1822 by a Board of Commissioners appointed for this purpose. The survey was

This grant went by inheritance to John B. Pratte, Jr., in 1836, and in 1843 it was purchased by John B. Valle, who ten years later sold it to Anthony La Grave. La Grave added 233 acres to the old grant, making in all 936 acres. He built a furnace and commenced to reduce the lead ore for which he found a ready sale. This was in 1861 at the outbreak of the Civil War when lead was in good demand as it was used extensively in the reduction of Rebel and Federal forces with muskets requiring ounce balls, also used extensively as cannon fodder in sieges and in conflicts between the

county's revenues. Small deposits of nickel, cobalt and copper were thrown up by those terrific convulsions which occurred centuries ago.

Thousands of dollars were invested in the mining industry here in the early "sixties"; and at the present time the aggregate sum invested runs into the millions, so rich are the mineral deposits of the county. Many minerals are found in the county, but the three most valuable are lead, granite and iron. Since Renault first came here in 1720 lead mining has been one of the leading industries of this region. Early mining was of a very

crude and primitive character, only a small per cent of the metal being extracted from the ore.

While this county is rich in minerals it is also rich agriculturally, its soil being of a highly productive character, and especially adapted to the raising of wheat, corn and hay.

VIEWS AT THE COUNTY SEAT



View of Columbia Street, Looking East.



Looking South on Washington Street.



West side of Public Square. St. Francois Hotel in Distance.

made by Henry Poston, one of the early settlers here. Thus was laid the nucleus from which the present Farmington has grown. Among the early settlers were John Andrews, Wm. Shaw, Joseph Bogy, Jr., John Boyce, M. P. Cayce, Isaac Mitchell, Ed Sebastian, Wm. O. Ross, N. L. Fleming and John D. Peers. John D. Peers opened the first store in 1823 in a small log building on the West side of the Public Square, near where the Pipkin building now stands.

Mine Development—Valles Mines

Among the oldest and most productive of the lead mines of the early years were Valle Mines situated near the Jefferson County line. They were opened in 1825 and for several years yielded about 1,500 tons of lead yearly. The ore was found in pockets. Valle, the first owner, had three daughters, who married three brothers, Felix, Francois and Firmin Rozier, and they or their representatives are yet interested in the property. They added vast areas to the original estate by acquiring other lead-bearing lands and mines adjacent thereto.

St. Joe Mines

It is the St. Joseph Lead Co. of Bonne Terre which first gave the county the distinction of being the greatest lead-producing county in the United States and in the world as for that matter. The land on which the old St. Joe Mines and reduction works were located consisted originally of 800 arpents of land, granted to John B. Pratte and surveyed in 1800.

Blue and the Grey.

In 1863 capitalists in New York had their attention attracted to this property and they sent out a committee to make a report, whereupon the St. Joseph Lead Co. was organized under the laws of New York and J. Wyman Jones was chosen President and he was for many years the leading spirit in the enterprise. The capital stock was \$1,000,000, and the first blast was in 1864. It was much later that the first real shaft was sunk. In the year 1866 there was 260,000 pounds mined, or 500 pigs per month. Thus was launched the first real lead mining on an extensive scale in the county.

In 1867, Mr. C. B. Parsons of Massachusetts arrived in Bonne Terre and was installed as Supt., a position which he held until his death. He found the works consisting of a small crushing mill, one set of rolls, and one little furnace. The work was being done by hand, and the output did not exceed 500 pigs of 72 pounds each per month. The outlook was discouraging, but Mr. Parsons got busy with his mechanical cunning to improve the machinery, which he had soon accomplished in a pleasing degree. He improved the process and enlarged and extended the works, until in 1882 the output had reached 15,000 pigs of 81 pounds each per month. But on February 25, 1883, the whole plant, machinery, engines, boilers and all were destroyed by fire. The improvements and labors of 20 years were consumed by the flames in a few short hours, but the experience which Mr. Parsons had gained was not destroyed, and it has been said

new shafts and properties, erected a splendid mill, calcines and several shafts on the Hoffman tract South of Bonne Terre and practically absorbed a sister company, the Doe Run, so today, it is the most valuable mining property in the country.

The history and growth of all the mining and affiliated companies, of which there are eight operating in this county, are analogous and in several instances practically identical, so much so that to give the history and growth of one is to give it of the rest, or so nearly that as to be practically in the essentials a repetition of words.

HISTORICAL GEOLOGY

When this continent began to emerge from a primeval ocean, Pilot Knob, Sheppard Mountain, and some of the highest points in St. Francois County were among the first bodies of land to appear above the great inundating seas of water. These elevated points of land thus grew to be islands, and stood alone and isolated in the ocean waste. These high points were formed in the Azoic seas by powerful internal convulsions that upheaved the earth and forced up the granite, slate and iron beds, the porphyry, lead, zinc and great ore mountains of this State and County.

Minerals

These upheavals were the occasion for the establishment of some of our greatest industries and afford us an asset and resource from which millions of dollars have been made, the local mining, milling and smelting being a principal source of this

crude and primitive character, only a small per cent of the metal being extracted from the ore.

While this county is rich in minerals it is also rich agriculturally, its soil being of a highly productive character, and especially adapted to the raising of wheat, corn and hay.

Soil

The soil is a red and yellow clay loam chiefly in the Eastern and Southeastern portions, the loam in the Central Eastern part having, in certain sections, what is called a "crawfish" tendency which reduces the fertility of the soil; while in the Southern and Southwestern parts it is of a mixture of sand loam and clay. In the West and North the surface is very rough and hilly, being that portion which was torn, rifted and upheaved by those terrific convulsions during the period of internal disturbance thousands of years ago; therefore the soil is generally rocky and sandy except where there has been alluvial deposits. This section is the center of the mining industries.

Location, Area, Etc.

St. Francois County lies South and West of Ste. Genevieve County, North of Madison, West of Iron and Washington and South of Jefferson County. It is very irregular in shape, somewhat resembling an aggregation of triangles obtuse in shape, having the apex facing, and has an area of about 450 square miles, or 288,000 acres. The surface is generally hilly, especially in the West and North portions, but there are several

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